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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHSQ/AMEMBASSY SKOPJE PRIORITY 1102
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0266

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ATHENS 002117

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/24/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [NATO](#) [GR](#) [MK](#)
SUBJECT: MACEDONIA'S AMBASSADOR CONVINCED GREECE WILL VETO
NATO ACCESSION

Classified By: CHARGE TOM COUNTRYMAN. REASON: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In an October 24 meeting, Macedonia's Ambassador to Greece, Blagoj Handziski, told Charge that he was now convinced Greece would make a name change a precondition for Macedonia's NATO entry. Handziski emphasized that NO Macedonian government could accept that. The only solution possible was the "dual name" formula -- which the Greeks had rejected in 2005. Charge agreed that the GOG appeared determined to breach the Interim Agreement and veto Macedonia's NATO invitation absent resolution of the name issue (although it would probably try to avoid a veto by persuading NATO allies that Macedonia was not ready). Charge suggested, however, that if either side could compromise, there were incentives each could offer and benefits each could gain -- including assurances on territorial integrity and measures to assist Greece's Slavo-Macedonian minority. Charge noted that while we continued to press the GOG to stick to the Interim Agreement, it was worth considering options available to both sides as negotiations under UN mediator Nimetz moved forward.

¶2. (C) COMMENT: Handziski is a shrewd evaluator of the Greek (and Macedonian) political scenes. He did not ask for the U.S. to play deus ex machina; we believe he was giving his own conclusions a reality check before sending them to Skopje. We agree that the GOG position has solidified. But we encouraged him to c that Greek PM country. Three or four months ago, Handziski admitted, there might have been some steps Macedonia could take to win Greek approval -- such as changing the name of Skopje's Alexander the Great airport or establishing a bilateral mechanism to review history textbooks (along the lines of the Greece-Turkey agreement signed by former FMs Papandreou and Cem). Another possibility was a GOM statement on Greece's Slavo-Macedonian minority, restating that GOM considered the issue an internal affair of the Hellenic Republic. But while he once thought that Greece would put regional stability and territorial integrity above its domestic concerns, Handziski was now convinced Greece was determined to make a name change a precondition for Macedonia's NATO entry.

¶4. (C) Handziski pointed out that, in Macedonia, all political parties agreed that NO government could accept a change in the country's name. If deprived of its name, the multi-ethnic nation lost the key to its national identity, and the government would fall. The situation in the region in the next few months was complicated enough, with disturbances likely as Kosovo's Final Status was resolved. The GOM's room for maneuver on the name issue was very limited; Handziski believed a dual name solution) using a separate name for the GOM's bilateral relations ith Greece -- was the only way out.

15. (C) Handziski a former Defense Minister who after nearly five years in Greece is a keen observer of Greek domestic politics, suggested that Macedonia had become both a political and psychological issue for the GOG. Politically, Karamanlis faced internal opposition from at least 12 ND MPs, including on the name issue. That would make it tough to legislate his reform agenda, and might lead to new elections as early as February-June 2008. Rumor had it that Karamanlis was seeking support from the small leftist parties for a "compromise name," in order to overcome ND divisions. Karamanlis was also planning to change the election law. Finally, Handziski suggested that jockeying among candidates to succeed Archbishop Christodoulos -- who would campaign on "national" issues -- would box the GOG in even further. Ultimately, Handziski believed Greece would expect its NATO allies not to allow it to be "defeated" by Macedonia on the name issue.

CHARGE: CONSIDER THE OPTIONS TO LEVERAGE FLEXIBILITY

16. (C) Charge agreed that the GOG had made its decision, though it would likely first seek to convince other Allies that Macedonia had simply not met NATO criteria for entry. Charge cited DAS DiCarlo's message while in Skopje, adding that we were also emphasizing to the GOG our strong expectation that they would hold to the terms of the Interim Agreement. But although the factors cited by Handziski were

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important to the GOG in framing the political environment, our assessment was that Karamanlis's main concerns were long term and strategic.

17. (C) First, Karamanlis was concerned about his political legacy. He recognized that if Macedonia were to enter NATO without a quid pro quo for Greece, it would mean the end of his government, and it would be for this single act that he would be remembered (negatively) in Greek history. Second, Karamanlis recalled the legacy of the Balkan wars of ninety years ago -- and was convinced that, years from now, an unscrupulous Macedonian politician might find a pretext for armed conflict over territory. We have argued to the GOG that a name change in itself would not be sufficient to address that far-fetched, but possible scenario. That is why we also would like to see both sides engage in serious discussion of confidence-building measures, even in advance of an agreement on the name. The GOG and GOM were mirror images: each imputing maximum bad faith to the other side, and neither calculating the harmful effect on the bilateral climate of statements/steps made for domestic consumption. That dynamic needs to be broken.

18. (C) Charge pointed to the upcoming Nimetz talks, expressing support for the process. It was hard to be optimistic about that process, given that the political consensus in Macedonia against any name change was as strong as the political consensus in Greece demanding a name change. Further, there would be risks if Nimetz put any proposal on the table. If he repeated his first suggestion of 2005 (rejected by Skopje), it would put pressure on the GOM. If he repeated his second 2005 proposal ("dual-name" rejected by Athens), it would pressure the GOG. Neither scenario would necessarily make it easier for the two sides to come to some agreement.

19. (C) Charge advised Handziski to consider the options and incentives the GOM might use. For example: if the GOM chose to make a small change in its name, it could potentially leverage important commitments from the GOG. These could include enthusiastic Greek "sponsorship" of its entry into NATO/EU, and measures to recognize and/or give cultural rights to Greece's Slavo-Macedonian minority. Another approach could be for the GOM to offer incentives to the GOG (well beyond renaming the airport) to get sufficient Greek flexibility on the name to permit entry (as FYROM) into NATO. These incentives might include reiteration of the

Interim Agreement's assurances on territorial integrity, agreement by the GOM not to seek a name change in the UN or NATO without prior Greek consent, and/or establishment of a confidence-building mechanism. Neither of these options would be easy, and neither is currently on the table, but they are the two logical directions that could lead to Macedonia's accession next year.

COUNTRYMAN